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Issue 7 November 1987

BLM begins studies of bald eagle populations

The American Bald eagle is often thought of as proud, fierce, aggressive. One would expect this bird to have little tolerance for intruders in its habitat, yet this summer two BLM biologists investigated 38 nests in the Gulkana River Basin, and were allowed to climb into the nests and band baby eagles with little interference by the parents.

One reason for the success of their effort was that they were very careful about what they did. "The time we chose to visit the nests is the period most conducive to doing our work without being disruptive," says Jeff Shryer, Glennallen District biologist.

The way the adults behaved was a surprise to seasonal biologist Frank Bird. He says the adults stayed close by, sitting in a tree watching as he climbed for more than an hour. "They would make noise and talk to the young, but only buzzed be in two cases."

Bird was assisting Shryer in the first year of a five-year study of eagles in the Gulkana River basin. The river is home to a large number of bald eagles and is also a growing attraction for fishermen and other recreationists. Eagles are attracted to the large salmon

Continued on page 2

Jeff Shryer, Glennallen District biologist, gently examines the wing of an eaglet being banded as part of an inventory of the birds.

u.s. department of the interior • bureau of land management

When biologist Frank Bird climbed up to the nests, the mature birds kept a close watch. Twice they "buzzed" him.

Eagle studies, *continued*

run and the stands of tall white spruce which make ideal nesting sites.

As manager of much of the Gulkana River watershed, the BLM must consider how human activity affects the eagle population. Shryer's inventory and monitoring effort will provide baseline data to be used in managing the area.

In May Shryer conducted an aerial survey to learn how many breeding pairs had established nests. From that he derived the number of potential young to be produced. The results of his inventory were surprising.

"I learned we have a much greater distribution of nests especially in the lake habitats than was first thought," notes Shryer.

Along 170 linear miles of river and 50,000 acres of wetlands habitat, Shryer found 38 nests including three active nests in the Delta River drainage.

After monitoring the nests for the presence of young, Shryer and Bird returned later in the summer to band the eaglets.

"I've been a fisheries biologist for 20 years, and had not worked with eagles before," says Bird. "It was most fascinating to be able to observe the young up close."

The two biologists theorize that because the eagle has few predators it is relatively secure about its habitat and has evolved a different kind of defense strategy.

Using techniques developed as a result of many years of raptor research across the country, the two men were careful about how they handled the baby eagles. Both were authorized to handle birds by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They continued to monitor the nests to be sure the eaglets were flying at the expected time period.

In assessing the results of the study, Shryer will compare data with U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologists who are studying eagles in the Tanana River watershed. The Tanana, an area with little recreation use, will be used for comparing population trends and productivity of the Gulkana eagles.

Next summer besides banding eaglets, the biologists hope to trap and band adult birds in order to determine the rate of return to the study area.

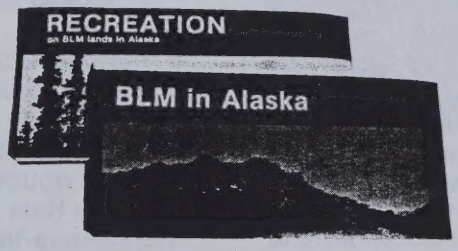
—DA/JS

Brochures show fun spots, public land

Hunting, fishing, river running and hiking are just a few of the recreational opportunities available to Alaskans on the more than 90 million acres of Alaska public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Where these lands are located and other useful information is contained in two new full-color brochures just released by the BLM.

"Recreation on BLM Lands in Alaska" includes an overview of all developed BLM recreation facilities in the state, the public recreation cabin program, summer and winter hiking opportunities, scenic highways and the six Wild and Scenic rivers managed by BLM.

The second brochure, "BLM in Alaska," shows the BLM-administered Public Lands in Alaska, the new BLM district boundaries, and the addresses and phone numbers of all BLM-Alaska offices. There also is a summary of major BLM multiple use programs and activities in the state with emphasis on ways the agency utilizes new technology to efficiently manage Alaska's Public Lands.



The brochures are free and available at all BLM offices in Alaska, the Alaska Public Lands Information Centers, or by writing the BLM Public Affairs Office, 701 C Street, Box 13, Anchorage, AK 99513.

-EB

Fall lunchtime talks set

Upcoming topics in BLM's new series of lunchtime programs:

October 20
The Gulkana National Wild and Scenic River

November 17
Cultural Resources on Public Lands

December 8
Dinosaurs in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska

These programs are free and open to the public. Programs are presented in the Executive Dining Room of the Anchorage Federal Building, 701 C Street, from 11:3 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. For further information, call Wayne Boden at 271-5477.

In hosted worker program

Students learn the BLM "ropes"

High school students often have a difficult time choosing a career unless they've had actual work experience in different fields. To help rural Alaskan students get that experience, BLM's Arctic District Office offered a pilot "hosted workers" program last summer. Hosted workers do volunteer work for BLM while being paid by someone else.

In this case, the Bureau of Indian Affairs paid a stipend to two high school juniors from Barrow and Point Hope, while BLM paid their air fare to and from Fairbanks and the cost of their room and board as guests of a BLM host family.

In Fairbanks the two students spent six weeks working with many different specialists in the Arctic District Office and learned something about each discipline. There they learned how to interpret and plot lake depths on maps, worked on archeological excavations, tracked radio-collared caribou and mapped the information. In addition, they conducted fish surveys, assisted in locating and evaluating recreational opportunities in an undeveloped area, and learned methods of putting scientific information into computers.

Students Richard Williams and William Okakok found the experience challenging. "Living and working in Fairbanks was strange at first — it was a new environment filled with new people," Williams said. "But after helping the different staff members around the office and in the field with their projects, we got to know them and were more comfortable."

This year's program coordinator, Paul Salvatore, was impressed with the students and commented, "The end products of their work were all usable. It was not just work for work's sake."

State Director Mike Penfold is a strong proponent of the program and expects it to expand to other district offices in the future.

Students holding a 3.0 or higher grade point average applied to the North Slope Borough School District last winter. The school district staff screened the students for grades, attitude and self-expression. Then BLM staff members interviewed those students recommended by the school district, looking for the ones who showed the initiative to gain new experience, eagerness to learn, and a willingness to leave home to get that experience.

Arctic District Manager Tom Dean, who set up the pilot program and has been one of its strongest advocates, said his staff developed it to provide solid work experience in resource management for rural students. Dean intends to have two juniors and two seniors working with the Arctic District staff in 1988. "The students did a great job this summer," Dean said. "They were exposed to new fields, ideas and concepts. They learned new skills and contributed quality work to BLM projects. All the supervisors enjoyed working with them and are looking forward to continuing next year."

During their hosted-worker experience, students Richard Williams (left) and William Okakok walked several miles back and forth taking magnetometer readings in a grid pattern at an archaeological site.

Okakok and Williams said they would like to return next year, and they've already requested additional fields they would like to work in.

This winter when BLM staff members visit rural schools to advertise the program, Okakok and Williams plan to accompany them and share their feelings about the program with other students.

For further information about the hosted worker program, contact Robert H. Jones, Equal Opportunity Officer, BLM Alaska State Office, 701 "C" Street, Box 13, Anchorage, AK 99513, telephone (907) 271-5066.

—SW/JM

EIS work on placer mines goes well

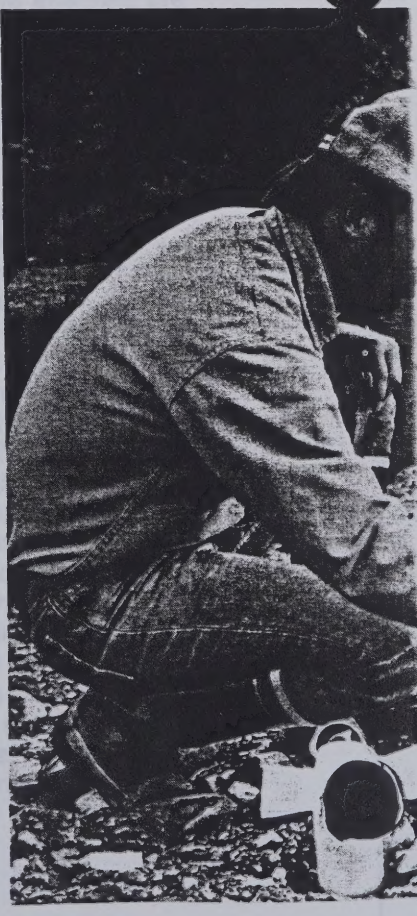
Public meetings over, work of writing begins

According to the project's technical coordinator, this summer's work has gone so well on preliminary studies for the placer mining environmental impact statements that the statements may be completed by December 1988. "Now we have a fighting chance to make it," says Page Spencer.

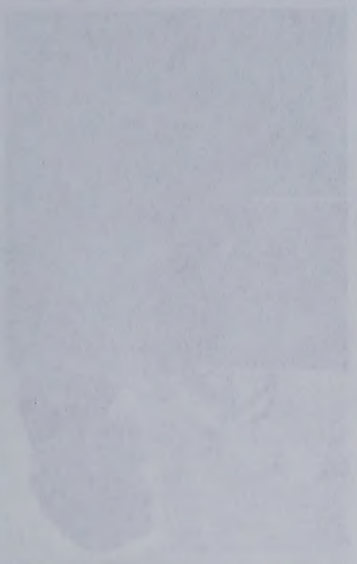
BLM has been ordered by the U.S. District Court to prepare an environmental analysis of the cumulative impacts of placer mining on Birch Creek, Beaver Creek, the Fortymile River and several streams draining into the Minto Flats.

Well over 150 people attended the scoping meetings held in Central, Chicken, Livengood, Fairbanks, Anchorage, Minto and Birch Creek during September and October, Spencer said. This is a large attendance for so early in the preparation of an impact statement. Miners and representatives of environmental groups were the main participants.

At these meetings Steese/White Mountains District Manager Don Runberg and Kobuk District Manager Roger Bolstad presented an expanded version of the alternatives BLM is proposing to consider in the impact statement. Members of the public talked about the issues and concerns they felt should be covered. According to Spencer, many



Left, Emily Barnett of the Sierra Club speaks at the Anchorage scoping meeting. Steese/White Mountains District Manager Don Runberg and EIS Project Manager Dick Dworsky listen attentively.



people at the meetings also supplied valuable information about the present environment of the area.

Many comments concerned the economic hardships that will result from the court-ordered shutdown of mining operations pending completion of the environmental analysis.

A number of people also had questions about how BLM will carry out the injunction. These had to do with the interpretation of the five-acre rule, exemptions from the injunction, the penalty for non-compliance with the court order, long-term camping on mining claims, and assessment work.

Other comments dealt with the environmental and subsistence impacts of both past and current mining activities, or suggested changes in the proposed alternatives.

To expedite the EIS work, BLM State Director Mike Penfold is devoting all available resources to the project.

"We've had the utmost cooperation from all the district offices and the state office," says Spencer. "Every time I ask for something, I get it —and on time."

Cooperation has also been the rule from all segments of the public, regardless of their point of view, Spencer observes.

"The miners have been incredibly cooperative, and have given us some excellent feedback. Yes, they're frustrated, because they're being economically impacted, but they're not blaming us. And the environmental groups are willing to work with us."

Spencer also reports the Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency and the State of Alaska have been giving BLM a lot of cooperation, as have other agencies.

To speed work on preliminary studies, the EIS team has now issued almost $200,000 worth of contracts to a variety of state and private concerns. Special studies, data collection and analysis are being prepared on water quality, aquatic habitat and faunal impacts, subsistence resources and uses, and the historical aspects and economic impacts of placer mining in the local area. These studies are expected to be completed by the end of this year.

Above, Page Spencer writes a description of the vegetation on a reclaimed area. Left, Dave Vogler, a BLM compliance inspector, measures settleable solids in a water sample taken below a mining operation.

EIS team members find gold—in the bottom of a sluice box. Team members made field trips last summer to do preliminary studies for environmental analyses.

The team has essentially finished their field work. Team members, assisted by the compliance specialists from BLM's Kobuk and Steese/White Mountains district offices, made a number of trips this summer to gather water quality information and to prepare descriptions of mining operations.

Actual writing of the impact statements began this month.

Besides the core group that is working full time on the project, the EIS team has now expanded to include 31 other specialists working either part-time or on short-term assignments.

—JM

New plan emphasizes multiple use

BLM recently published a draft multiple-use plan for the Utility Corridor and some adjacent lands north of Fairbanks. The Utility Corridor is a narrow strip of land that stretches from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez. Both the trans-Alaska oil pipeline and the Dalton Highway run through this corridor, which was specifically designated by Congress in 1971 for transportation and the transmission of utility lines.

However, the corridor is a large area, and there are many places along the highway that are well suited for recreation. Also there are more than 3,500 valid mining claims within its outer limits. These varied potential uses have shaped the draft recommendations. Planning Project Manager Dave Ruppert says, "In the draft plan we've reaffirmed that the primary purpose of the corridor is the transportation of oil and gas. We also feel there's a need for managing most of the corridor lands from the multiple-use standpoint, with an emphasis on development of recreational opportunities."

BLM strongly recommends that new demands for recreation use be met by developing "new and old campsites, hiking trails, walking access to rivers, and interpretive signs for archeological and natural history sites," according to Ruppert. "We would also encourage private development of recreation concessions," he said.

Accompanying the plan is a study of the wilderness values in an area outside the corridor itself, the Central Arctic Management Area, or CAMA. Congress ordered this study in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA), which set aside several conservation units adjacent to the corridor.

BLM's preliminary recommendation is to designate the 41,000-acre Nigu Block as wilderness.

The public comment period for the draft plan is open until November 30, 1987.

Responding to increased interest in these areas, BLM aims to provide for recreation and other uses in its new plan, while still protecting the corridor's primary purpose: transporting oil and gas.

The draft plan recommends:

1. Manage the corridor with primary emphasis on providing for the transportation of energy minerals.

2. Develop the recreational opportunities afforded by the presence of the Dalton Highway.

3. Designate 13 areas of critical environmental concern to protect wildlife and subsistence resources.

4. Close the Kanuti River and the fish spawning areas of the Jim River and Prospect Creek to mining to protect fish stocks important to sport and subsistence fishing.

5. Close selected mineral licks to mining to protect important sheep habitat.

6. Incorporate careful consideration of environmental issues and subsistence issues int the off-road vehicle evaluation an the identification of access and transportation needs.

7. Maintain the withdrawal of the "inner corridor" from mining and keep the "outer corridor" open to mining. Open the Venetie block and CAMA to mining.

8. Open the majority of lands to mineral leasing with standard stipulations and open sensitive areas where special stipulations can provide adequate environmental protection.

9. Maintain development nodes at the Yukon Crossing, Coldfoot and Chandalar. Establish a node at Happy Valley.

10. Reserve a transportation corridor from the Dalton Highway west through Prospect for future access to the Ambler Mining District. This corresponds to an existing winter trail from Bettles to the highway.

11. Amend the current public land order to allow state selectio in the Coldfoot node, on certain lands adjacent to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and corridor lands south of the Yukon River.

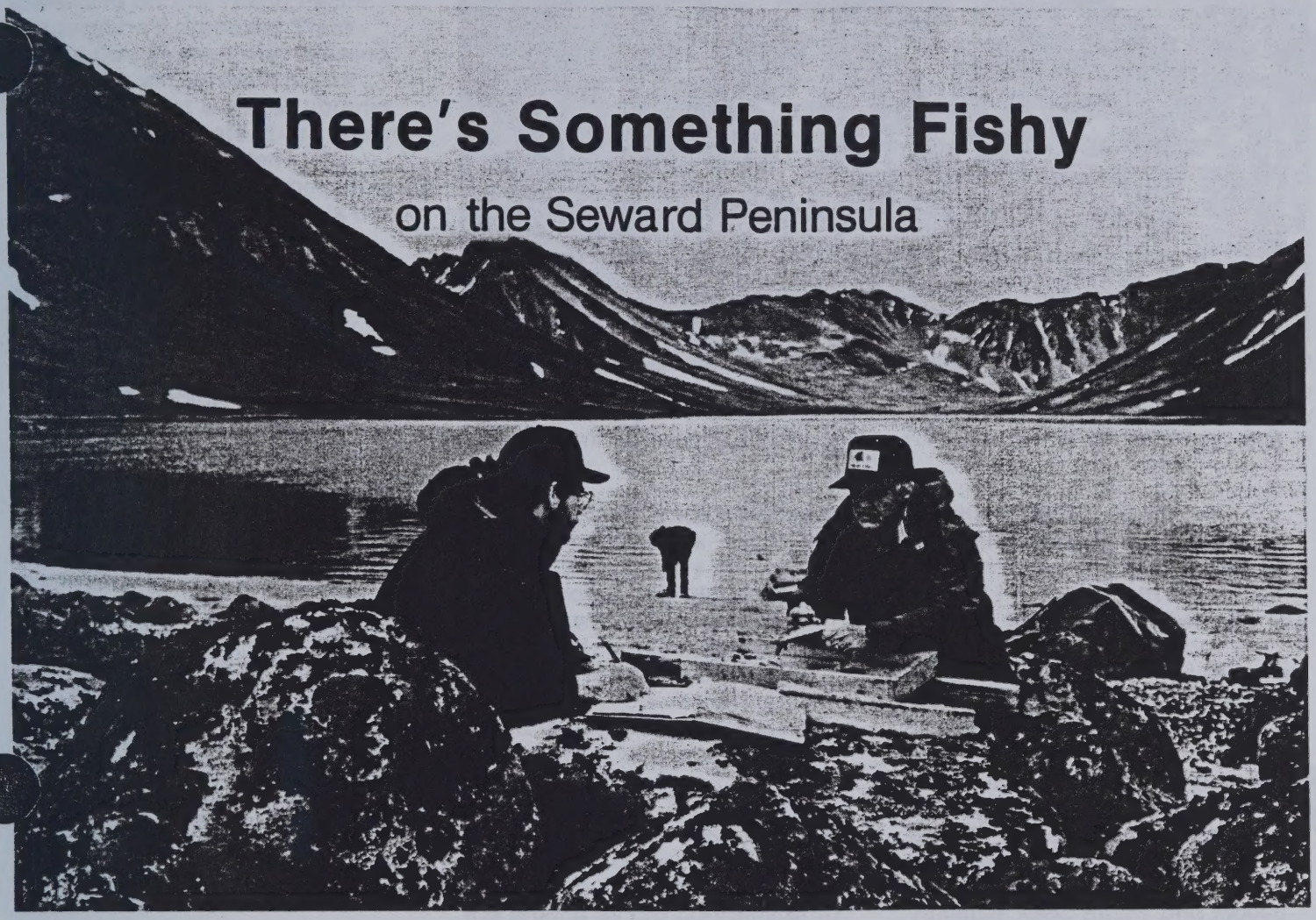
-SM/JM

Public meetings and hearings for the Draft Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan are scheduled at the following locations:

Fairbanks, Noel Wein Library, October 7
Anchorage, Anchorage Museum of History and Art, October 9
Coldfoot, Arctic Acres Inn, October 13
Bettles/Evansville, Evansville Council Building, October 14
Stevens Village, Community Center, October 15

There's Something Fishy

on the Seward Peninsula



Carl Kretsinger, left, and Joe Webb dissect a fish from an unnamed lake in the Kigluaik Mountains while Larry Knapman, background, takes water chemistry samples.

Few people visit the Kigluaik Mountains, a highly scenic, rugged range of mountains on the Seward Peninsula about 30 miles north of Nome. But this past summer BLM biologists conducted the first fisheries inventory of the remote glacial lakes and streams in this isolated corner of Alaska. What they learned will be of interest to hikers and recreationists who visit the area in the future.

Until now, little was known about what species of fish inhabit the area. Biologists Joe Webb and Carl Kretsinger from BLM's Kobuk District spent three weeks studying fish habitat and the numbers and types of fish present in eight rivers and streams and five lakes.

The streams in and around the mountains contain Dolly Varden, grayling, pike and salmon. The Sinuk and Cobblestone rivers and Canyon Creek are spawning places for pink and chum salmon. The Kuzitrin River, which flows on the north side of the Kigluaiks into Imuruk Basin, has excellent pike fishing in its upper reaches.

Cobblestone and Grand Central rivers both have good populations of juvenile Dolly Varden. The Sinuk River on the south side of the range offers excellent grayling fishing.

For the lake studies the team measured water depth, chemistry, oxygen, temperature and outflow. The team took fish samples using gill nets and hook and line.

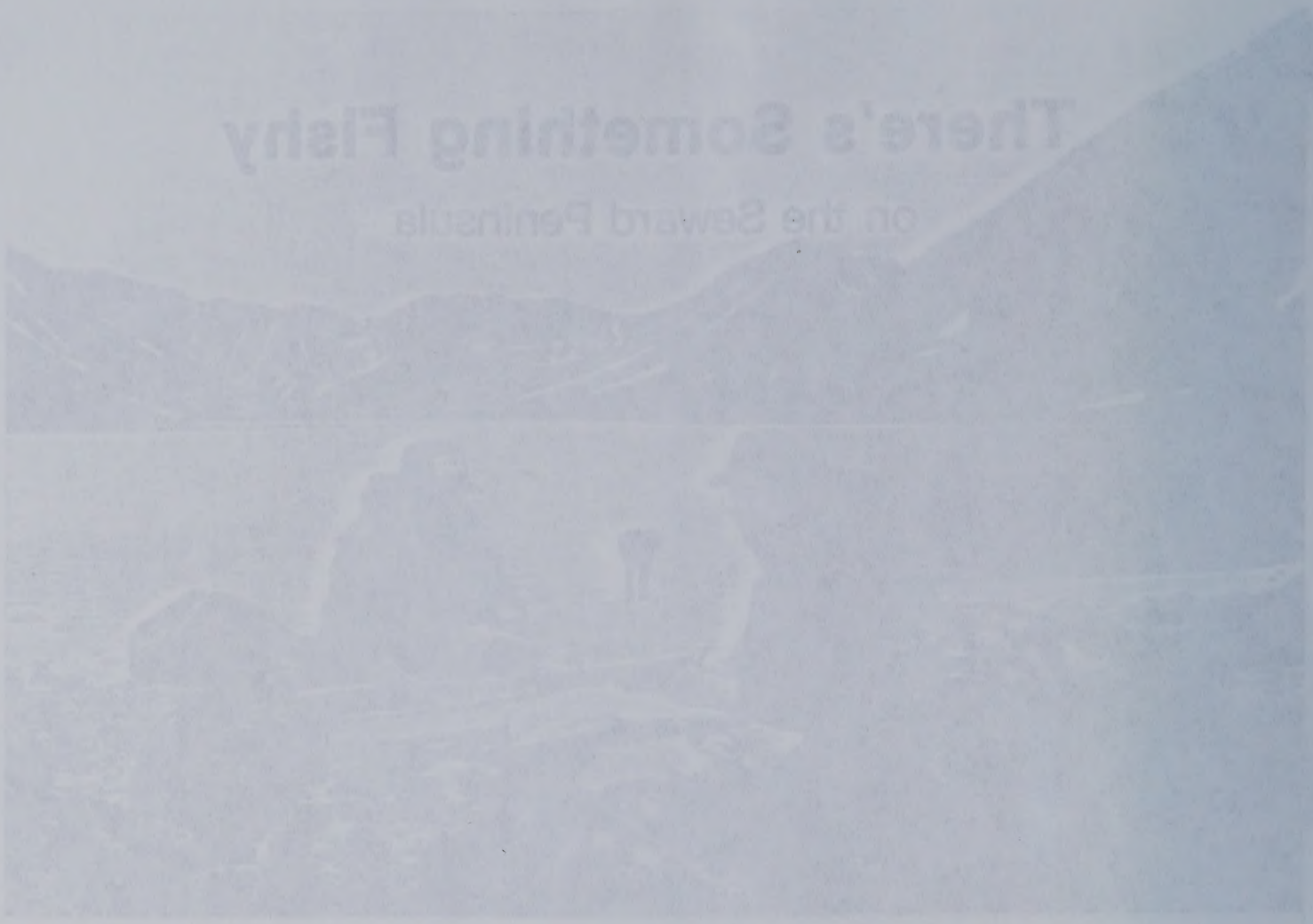
A portable backpack electro-shocker was used on the streams to stun young fish for collection.

The researchers recorded length, stomach contents, sex and maturity. They also collected the otolith, a bone in the ear, for later analysis. Growth rings on this bone indicate age.

Webb and Kretsinger are studying the data and will report their findings this winter. They have found that lakes in the Kigluaik Mountains are generally unproductive. Arctic char was the only species found, and some lakes contained no fish at all. Webb estimates that their growth is very slow due to the lack of food in the cold glacial lakes.

Hiking is easy in these treeless mountains which offer outstanding recreational opportunities for backcountry exploration. This fishery inventory will provide information to the hiker who also wants to experience the thrill of quality fishing away from the crowds.

—SM/EB



frontier flashes

The **Draft Environmental Impact Statement** on the Yukon Pacific Corporation's proposed **Trans-Alaska Gas System** was released last month and is available for public review at selected libraries throughout the state. Extra copies were quickly exhausted. The preferred alternative recommends a route that roughly parallels the trans-Alaska oil pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez. Written comments will be accepted through November 20. Public hearings are scheduled as follows: October 23: Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly Room, 7:00 p.m. (Soldotna); October 24: Anchorage Museum of History and Art, 1:30 p.m. (Anchorage); October 26: City Council Chambers, 7:00 p.m. (Valdez); October 27: High School Gym, 7:00 p.m. (Glennallen); October 28: Hutchinson Career Center, 7:00 p.m. (Fairbanks); October 29: Borough Assembly Room, 2:00 p.m. (Barrow); October 30: Community Center, 10:00 a.m. (Stevens Village); October 30: Coldfoot Services, 2:00 p.m. (Coldfoot). For more information contact Jules Tileston at (907)267-1268. Oral testimony at these meetings will be limited to 10 minutes per person.

Anchorage Mayor Tony Knowles, U.S. Senator Ted Stevens and Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor joined the representatives of numerous state and federal agencies to dedicate the new Alaska Public Lands Information Center in Anchorage.

Alaska State Director **Michael Penfold** recently received the Interior Department's second highest honor, the **Distinguished Service Award**. Penfold was recognized for his management initiatives, including statewide reorganization, a new process to speed land transfers, and new emphasis on land exchanges.

▽

Arlan Kohl retired last month as BLM's Chief of Pipeline Monitoring. He first signed on with the project as EIS coordinator in 1971.

Ethel McMillin, a computer programmer analyst at BLM's Fairbanks Support Center, was named **Ft. Wainwright's Federal Woman Employee of the Year**. The award recognized her work in furthering computer knowledge at her office, in schools, and in the community.

▽

Mining engineer **John Santora** has been chosen BLM-Alaska Deputy State Director for Minerals. Santora was NPR-A project manager in the early 1980's. He replaces Reed Smith who moved to Washington, D.C. last July.

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